

ND ag commissioner feels 'blindsided' by new EPA pesticide report

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North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring

BISMARCK – North Dakota's agriculture commissioner said he feels “blindsided” by a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announcement that the agency's pesticide inspections need to resume in the state.

State ag department officials already are enforcing state and federal pesticide requirements, and public safety isn't at risk, Doug Goehring said.

The EPA's Office of Inspector General issued a report Monday on what it termed "lapses" in EPA pesticide inspections in North Dakota.

According to the report: "EPA Region 8 (which includes North Dakota) is not conducting inspections at establishments that produce pesticides in North Dakota. Further, North Dakota does not have a state inspector with qualifications equivalent to a federal inspector to conduct inspections on the EPA's behalf. As a result, federal inspections of establishments that produce pesticides in North Dakota have not occurred for 14 years."

Goehring disagreed with any implication that the state ag department is doing an inadequate job.

"We do implement state law and we do implement federal law," he said. "For OIG to imply we aren't doing the inspections is misleading and disingenuous."

The state ag department previously provided EPA with documentation of what North Dakota officials are doing, Goehring said.

The report says "EPA pesticide inspections must resume in North Dakota to determine compliance and protect human health and the environment," a process that apparently will be phased in over the next year.

Goehring said he doesn't know what that means and is asking EPA for clarification.

In any case, the North Dakota ag department will continue to implement state and federal law, he said.

The ag department, through a cooperative agreement with EPA, regulates the use of pesticides in the state, according to the department's website.

Goehring suggested EPA's announcement might be politically motivated. The state ag department, state ag community and state government have all disagreed with the agency on several issues, he said.

"I get the feeling the White House isn't very happy with us. Maybe EPA isn't very happy with us because we've pushed back on some issues," he said.

"This looks and feels like we just got run over by the bus," Goehring said.

It wasn't clear Monday whether EPA plans to step up its pesticide enforcement in any other state.

Two spokespeople in EPA's Office of Inspector General in Washington, D.C., didn't return calls on Monday seeking comment.

The Office of Inspector General "is an independent office within EPA that helps the agency protect the environment in a more efficient and cost effective manner," according to the EPA website.

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